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REMBRANDT: INTERPRETER OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

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"BRAVE LITTLE HOLLAND," "THE AMERICAN IN HOL-
LAND," "THE STUDENT'S MOTLEY," ETC.

IN Leyden and Amsterdam in July, 1906, the world will do honor to Rembrandt. The first seat of learning in the Northern Netherlands was the place of his birth. In Europe's primate city of tolerance he wrought his mighty works.

Rembrandt harnessed to his genius the elemental forces of light and shadow. With little or no pigment, he made deathless pictures; but, when he would, his color was beyond the brilliancy of Venetians. Legend even covered his canvas with gold-leaf, so rich were his golden browns. Yet, amazing as was his technique, to fascinating generations of artists who would win his secrets, he was even greater as the interpreter of his own and the coming centuries. Above all, he was master of ideas, and his message was in the language of ideas. He was the mightiest of "post-exilic" prophets. Cryptic to popular taste and defiant to exasperated patrons, he summed up the old and opened the new testament of art. After much misunderstanding yet with steadily increasing appreciation, he has come unto his own. Critical biography has already ploughed under the luxuriant weeds of lying legend. The square inches of his canvas now call for equivalents in guineas, or gold pieces. Where his funeral cost twelve florins, myriads of guilders will be spent upon festal celebrations in his honor. The house, Saskia's home, once sold over his head, now restored to honor, and the property of the municipality, is a Mecca for pilgrims and admirers. An annex to the National Museum, especially built to be the treasure-house of his masterpieces, will be solemnly installed. His etchings will be published

in sumptuous reproduction. In both the artist's vernacular and in the Vulgate will be issued those parts, that is, the greater part, of the Deathless Book, which the master illustrated with needle-point or brush. These enterprises of permanent commemoration, with popular celebrations, show how grandly the Dutch people can build the tombs of their prophets,—especially when the world crowns their memories as truth-tellers.

In spite of Lautner, the destructive German critic, who assigns most of Rembrandt's triumphs to Ferdinand Bol, nearly seven hundred works of the Dutch master, according to his *Old Mortality*, Bode, remain. At antipodes of Lautner, is the anonymous "Deutshen," from whose sixty-fourth edition of "*Rembrandt als Erzieher*," now before us, we learn that the man of Leyden is a "universal reformer," "symbol and personification of all those elements at present wanting in Germany."

During the three centuries since the miller's son saw light, three stages of fame, two of them forms of detraction and measured each by a century, may be noted.

The apogee of the painter's prosperity was covered by the period of his love, courtship and marriage with Saskia. After her death, in 1642, the artist of the so-called "Night Watch" was, like his own great picture, misunderstood. From the point of view of fat prosperity, such as would count even the career of Calvary a foolish one, Rembrandt's was a failure. Ahead of his age, he paid the usual penalty of the prophet who sees timeless truth too clearly for present emolument. The members of Captain Frans Banning Cock's company were to be pictured. Exactly like a present-day subscriber to a county "history," who wants at least a page for his fame, with half-tones of self, wife and stock, each musketeer of Amsterdam paid to have his face and clothes put on canvas for immediate effect. Life is short. Happy are we that art is long. Rembrandt painted a panorama for all time. Disappointing personal vanity, he set forth Martial Netherlands in undying tints. The militant republic is before our eyes. Here the glory of life, the splendor of patriotism, the secret of brave, little Holland show themselves. It is a national picture.

What is the story of the "Night Watch"? The answer is that its experience explains the odd title first given seriously by a renowned English painter, notwithstanding that it is a transcript of a scene in broad daylight, with sun-shadows, and with data

marking the very hour of the day. The French followed, in the "*Ronde de Nuit*," but pragmatic knowledge knocks to flinders whole folios of criticism concocted when Rembrandt's March of the Civic Guard lay, like a caricature of itself in first freshness, under cakes of dirt and strata of pipe and peat-stove smoke.

Furious at the painter, who had buried their conceit and parochial fame (not even limning their names on a shield—added later by some other hand) these Amsterdammers damned the canvas by making it the target, on their armory walls, alike for volleys of oaths and for their tobacco fumes.

The second century saw even greater humiliation to the masterpiece. When removed to the City Hall, a foot and a half was snipped off to fit the canvas between two windows.

When Reynolds first saw it under layers of grime and smear, and successive deposits of smoke, soot and cakes of dirt, it seemed a Night Watch, indeed.

But how beautiful is old truth when rearrayed in the fresh robes of the virtue which is next to godliness! Happily for Rembrandt's fame and the world's enjoyment, the curator of the Rijks Museum went in one day at the work of restoration. Laid flat over slow fumes of unheated alcohol the black dirt was flattered as if it were part of the gold and glory of the original, and the grime fell off and away. With "travel-stained garments all laid down," Rembrandt's masterpiece rose to golden resurrection. The picture of Martial Holland once more carried critics to Paradise on the stairways of surprise, by the splendor of its tints and the glory of its form.

The picture in its history forms a parable of the artist's life, and the history of criticism concerning him. The first period of his popularity ended with the death of his beloved Saskia. Private sorrows made him a man of grief. Adverse change of popular taste left him stranded in fortune. Unmerciful disasters followed fast and faster. His house, collections, private belongings—even to his linen at the laundry—were sold under the auctioneer's hammer. His sun of life set amid clouds of poverty, obscurity and gloom. Yet never for a moment did he lower his standard. Before the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune he reared the white shield of a high art ideal. He may have been painting his memory of Saskia, in "*The Jewish Bride*," when Death palsied his arm.

In the second century, the unheroic eighteenth, what with ignorance of Dutch history and detail, the craving for apocryphal anecdote and gossip, and the wormlike industry of Houbraken—the Weems of the period—Rembrandt's name, like a Roman pavement of mosaic, sank under the growth of wind-wafted soil and brambles. Thickets of tradition sprang up. History was written by guesswork. "Rembrandt was born in a mill"—because he pictured one. The "Repose in Egypt" became a "Gypsy Camp." "The Jewish Bride" and "Rembrandt's Concubine" are specimens of traditional and catalogue names. On the baseless fabric of conjecture, Rembrandt was described as a traveller in England and Italy, besides doing uncounted other things, very wonderful, indeed, but unknown to the records. In that era of dogma-making, and the golden age of legend, tradition stood in militant and defiant attitude, locked up like a giant warrior in riveted brass.

In the third century, science came forth with the smooth stones of the brook. In the warfare of truth, successors of Spinoza, Grotius, Bekker, Coccejus, show that long, as well as old, is Holland's list of leaders of thought; albeit Motley, like a Lafayette, led the hosts in truth's van of research. Fruin in history, Huët in literature, Kuenen in scholarship, Vosmaer in art criticism, to be followed by Michel and Bode, made plain the age and land of Rembrandt and his place in them. "History is a resurrection."

Of the phenomenal side of the first half of the seventeenth century, its battles and sieges, the Dutch struggle and victory, the Thirty Years' War, all the world knows. Has not everybody read the American historian of the Netherlands—though he may have misread, or not wholly seen aright, the long duel between Union and Secession, incarnated in the persons of Maurice and Barneveldt? The whole people asked: Are we a nation, or only a confederacy? But what of the unphenomenal world—of mind and thought? Who has written, who has pictured, this theme, which awaits its Lecky?

At victorious Leyden, in 1606, when the siege was still thrilling the memory of living men, Rembrandt was born, and his was a new world. The triumphant Dutch Republic had shattered the old world of papal supremacy, the Inquisition, divine right, feudalism, chivalry, monopoly of trade, closing of the seas, the

prerogative of church rulers to divide and apportion the earth, to fetter the conscience, to torture and burn the body for opinion's sake. The brain and hand of William of Orange had unriveted that medieval shackle of conscience—*cujus regio, ejus religio*.

This German and his Dutchmen ushered in the dawn of world-wide tolerance, vernacular scriptures, freedom for mind and spirit, government based on voluntary taxation and representation, the new world in which right of kings and popes had no place except by consent, whence witchcraft was banished, wherein humanity was more than theology, and Divine immanence, as well as ineffable transcendence, fed faith. Anabaptist so-called, Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminius, Menno Simons, Spinoza; and, later, Descartes, Coccejus, Balthazar Bekker—all had a part in holding the ploughshare of truth, beam deep, to turn under the old and to open the elemental and eternal to receive new seeds. The time had come for reality in light and shadow. Rembrandt was the prophet in art of the new world of thought and vision. He read deeply the works of God and the soul of man. He perused humanity's greatest book. The States-General version of the Bible, which, in its honest literalness, has at so many points anticipated modern scholarship, was this Dutch artist's study, and in its truths and law he meditated day and night. Yet ever, for interpretation of the text, he sat with the pupil's mind at the feet of the Hebrew rabbi, the Mennonite preacher, and the plain man, as well as the officially orthodox teacher. He had that subtle sympathy and profound faith in man, as object of the Divine love, which marked men like Lincoln. He searched long and deep after whatever of Orientalism was then accessible in books or in objects brought by the ships from afar. His joy was to read aright those narratives which, be their form Hebraic, Aramaic or Hellenic, belong to humanity's unlocalized and undated poetry.

Herein are the glory and the immortality of Rembrandt. He kept aloof from all petrifying dogma, from wasteful definition of doctrine, from the ever-murky atmosphere of controversy. Reactionary Holland mummified truth in symbols of logic. After snapping the bands of Roman imperialism which had long masqueraded in the name of the lowly Galilean, it reentered the prison of Grecian dialectics, Latin logic and medieval symbols. Rembrandt loved truth without mythology or emblem. He made reality lovely. He broke the tradition that mingled fairy-tales

with Holy Scripture. He was under no illusion as to scholastic names, or cathedral millinery. He was proof against the fascination of processions, vestments and incense, on the one hand, and against creed and catechism, the edifices of logic and clerical subtlety, on the other. It was to the Master Himself, and not to Augustine or Calvin, that he went to learn the Divine love and wisdom. He pierced to the heart and inner meaning of all things phenomenal. His intense sympathy with humanity made his gaze as penetrating and revealing as an X-ray. Without going into camp, or visiting battle-fields, he was the best interpreter of heroic Holland. Ignoring contemporary strife in Church and State, he yet painted man's noblest spirit in struggle. He brought art down from the skies, out of metaphysic and mythology, out of cathedral and prince's palace, and gave it to the people.

Rembrandt set the vision splendid, of man's Divine inheritance of beauty, on the solid earth, owned and enjoyed by men who can be happy without pope, king or bishop. He glorified brotherhood more than celibacy, and motherhood more than nunnery and denial of life. In Rembrandt's mind, even though he painted the Holy Family and Mary the Mother of Jesus, there was none of that aversion to the God-ordained method of making a family and a home of which mythology and dogma, made by the imitation of paganism, are so full. To the Rembrandt-like mind, a man may be godlike, without being suspected of being the son of Apollo. The archaic Japanese way of accounting for divine children, by a god's crunching jewels and spitting them out to form offspring, is only one of a thousand variants of a human desire to exalt those supremely beloved. Yet such a form of well-meant honor is opposed alike to nature, law and the whole trend of inspired prophecy in the Old Testament. In Rembrandt's treatment of holy themes, the traditional and ecclesiastical are but mere detail. The human, the God-ordained, that which the Son of Man emphasized, is in his foreground and set in fullest light.

Yet Rembrandt, who flattered not those poets who are silent about him, lacked literary allies, nor had he a successor. Safe, rich, orthodox Holland of the eighteenth century, gorged with wealth and the spoils of the East, forgot him. A great famine of taste set in, so that though the work of "an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver," a Rembrandt canvas was disposed of for a stiver.

Yet the artist was not alone in oblivion. Did the Dutch know or care for their own history? Night fell also on the giants' books. Who, until Motley awoke the slumbering Dutch scholars, read Hooft, Bor, Wagenaar, Baudart, van Meteren? Did even Leyden, or any Dutch university, hold a professorship of *Vaderlandsche Historie*, until within the memory of young men now living? Holland paid the penalty of sudden wealth and Oriental spoil in the price of political oblivion.

Now, rereading, the Dutch appreciate their heroic age, and their giants of thought and art. Rembrandt is seen, not as the interpreter of the unappreciative eighteenth, or early nineteenth, but of their own heroic age, and of our own twentieth century, grandest of all the ages. Rembrandt is the painter of democracy, of reality, of what lies in the shadow—though those who are gorged with power see it not. In art, in religion, in organized life—call we it the Nation, the State, the City, the Church, or with whatever symbol or abstraction men put truth in the sheath, or under the label—Rembrandt is interpreter, emancipator, and re-creator. He teaches us obedience to higher, even to eternal, law.

In that wonderful power which Rembrandt had of being satisfied with God and nature, without the wrappings of the dogmatician and traditionalist, how many twentieth-century men of serious mind resemble the Dutch painter! They find spiritual sustenance in studying God's ways among men and in the universe, more than (alas!) within church walls. Yet the work of this heretic in art was not in denial, or destruction, but rather in stronger affirmation and more genuine reconstruction. In place of plaster and stucco, he built the city of art and truth, steel-braced and earthquake-proof, against the shocks of time and doubt.

Rembrandt personified science and faith. In his environment, he found and realized the universe. Delivering himself from the bondage of the local and the present, he lived in the unseen and eternal, while yet beholding with sympathy man's struggle on the solid earth. He shared in his nation's sense of joyous achievement and in the right of man to have his own, despite the lust of power in Church and State. His interpretation in art of humanity is wonderfully like that of another son of man, who came not to the privileged few, but to the common many. Jesus gave an interpretation of the law which was very unsatisfactory

to those who sat in Moses' seat. Rembrandt displeased the painters and their patrons who wanted the twelve apostles to be represented as senators and courtiers.

When we in our day ask, "Who have been the best interpreters of the Divine in man, and noblest exemplars of the Christ-life?" do we go to the churchmen, or theologians? Do we inquire of those who have heard sermons, and read "lesson helps" all their lives? Is it not rather in such men, as, whether in high office or humble life, are like the silent, the real Washington, the actual Lincoln—men whose "orthodoxy" was uncertain—that we find what Christianity is and means? Instinctively, the common people accept these men of like mind and life with the Nazarene, as the Master's real disciples.

In this our century, the rise of Japan on the world's horizon, like Holland's in the seventeenth, compels the same inquiry that then agitated the seat of Church Power in Southern Europe—"What is Christianity?" It was thought, and it was orthodoxy to think, that this question had been settled by Rome and Madrid. When, in 1619, the Holland politicians manipulated the Synod of Dordrecht, locked up its Canons under "the five heads of doctrine" in an iron-bound chest, it was believed that finality had been attained. If to-day Russian orthodoxy, for example, incarnated in Tsar, Holy Synod, State Church, bureaucracy, or ikon-worship, be Christianity, then some of us would prefer to be saved by Bushido. Yet what Delilahs even in the Church nearer home! "The Word of God is not bound." Those who most closely study Jesus, in His life and word, believe less in the Christianity of the heresy-hunters, and more in Him and those who follow Him, though they eschew Greek dialectics in order to do so.

Rembrandt is teacher. He would have us break "the letter's unprolific sheath" for the *veritas* that lurks within. He pits science against tradition, and unwraps truth from the mummy cerements which those who lust for the succession of power would still keep on. So in religion, the Rembrandt mind works mischief to the dogma-worshippers. What is the meaning of the ever-increasing host of serious, godly, devout, reverent and religious men outside the Church? What is the supreme purpose of those unquailing scholars who search, of writers who tell their thoughts, and of pastors, restless against outworn shells of

truth, who defy their accusers? With hearts warm to their fellow men, they are cold to the corporations that monopolize religion for personal advantage, even while they cry out to the living God. These men, walking very close to the Master, are as eager for truth as was Spinoza when excommunicated. They despise the medieval traditions that repel, and the dogmas, born in the atmosphere of paganism, that insult intelligence. They feel that the more they know the real Jesus the less can they believe what the church symbols teach.

Parents are increasingly perplexed in finding out where to send their sons and daughters, that their "faith" may be nourished. Yet fathers and mothers must learn that the world of the average church atmosphere is not the world of the modern college or the university. What, for argument in one field, may be heaviest artillery, is, on another, most distressing *impedimenta*. To bind Nature and the Bible into second, ninth, or seventeenth century formulas, is too great a task even for the colossal intellect of the twentieth century.

"The soul of man," as truly now as when Montgomery wrote his lay, still "keeps two worlds at strife"; but the worlds are not now Heaven and Hell; they are the Church and the University. Much of the life and influence of the Church has passed out into the class-room. The teacher moulds thought and opinion more than the traditionalist in the pulpit. The average preacher is afraid of science, and does not dare to trust his Master, even to walking on stormy waves, as against the voice of the silver-haired deacon or the middle-aisle pew. Not for him to throw away the pretty paganisms that are parasitic on the religion of Jesus, and trust to the elemental light and shade of simple truth. Happy for the Christian teacher of to-day if he can put on the Rembrandt mind, and in the spirit of his own age and of all the ages, put difference between the alleged "conflict" of religion and science and the so-called "warfare of science and dogmatic theology." The "wise householder, instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven," sees nothing of the sort; but only the struggle between the men hungry for power, who cloak their ambitious schemes and lust of pelf or potency under one name or both. There is as much "conflict" between religion and science as there is between chemistry and science, or between bacteriology and medicine; no more, no less. Theology, which is the adjustment of man's faith and his

knowledge, will always be queen of the sciences. Yet there will ever be an everlasting difference between theology and religion. What was Rembrandt's theology, what Washington's, Lincoln's? Who knows? Yet of their religion, all feel sure. It is quite certain that, if Jesus were again with the doctors in the modern Temple, His answers would hardly be esteemed orthodox. He would find much taught in His name of which He knew nothing. He has Himself declared that to many who did wonderful works in His name He will say, "I never knew you."

When, furthermore, Science calls History to her aid, the old church-world will pass away like a dream; yes, even now is vanishing. Worse yet for the medieval fabric, that seems so fair to gentlemen of the cassock, the prayer-book, the canons of Dort and the catechisms of Westminster, is the testimony of the gospels and the witness of Jesus Himself. Neither physical science nor history has done, nor can do, that work of destruction that Jesus' own life and words are yet to accomplish. Theological libraries will become punk and junk, but His words will never pass away. Criticism, as yet, has hardly thrown the ecclesiastical crockery off the shelves. The truth of the Christ of God, when realized in human life, will come as a cosmic lurch. A real knowledge, of what Jesus taught and lived and died for, shall turn most of the Greek, Latin, Anglican, and Yankee accretions of churchmen into rubbish, and the fire will consume the tall structures of metaphysicians and doctors. Men are increasingly under the idea of law, under the conviction that this universe is a garden, not a factory; that the story of the race is an evolution in the method of the Divine working; that man is under education by One who still walks in the cool of the day, and calls His creatures to account, to chastisement, and to loving reward.

Increasingly does the thinking man, especially he who sinks a shaft under the scholastic débris of the ages, believe in and heartily accept the deeper, yes, the deepest truths of the Bible. He can enjoy the Bethlehem story in as simple a form as did Mark or Paul. He no more worries over the results to "faith" of the occultation of the legendary features, than did evangelist or apostle. He is satisfied that neither man nor woman can improve on the divinely ordained method of the propagation of children, and the formation of the family. Before the mystery of life, the reverent man is mute; and, like the hero of the world's

greatest naval battle, ascribes his blessings to the grace of Heaven. To see in the life of Jesus, not an abnormal, but a greater, human experience of One who had in Him all of divinity that flesh and blood can hold, is neither danger nor denial, but only deeper faith in the one name "given among men whereby we must be saved."

Study the books of the supposed "enemies" of orthodox Christianity, and what is their dominant note? In the eyes of those who, thinking to do God's service, must preserve intact the matchless manual of Occidental devotion "from cover to cover," of those to whom the traditional mass of European dogma is identical with Christ's own words, the books of such men, Americans, for example, as Briggs, Schmidt, Foster, Crapsey, are as Shinosé bombs. It is alleged that they can have but one result—that of overthrowing "faith," shattering ideals, destroying the Christian religion. Yet a reader with the Rembrandt-like mind sees in these books, rather, history made sure, and the greater truth that absorbs and fulfils the lesser statements of it. One certain result, hateful to lawn and gown and traditional power, is that Hebrew and Christian are drawn into closer fellowship, seeing eye to eye their Friend, who in earthly lineage was of the Jews. It is said that when the Russian idolaters of the ikon find out that Jesus was a Jew, there will be revolution against the Holy Synod as well as against the Tsar-pope. Possibly, when some Protestants discover the real prophet of Nazareth, they will be shocked to learn that, should He come to worship in many churches of His name, He would not recognize Himself or His teachings. It is certain that right knowledge of Him, of His leading ideas, of His favorite texts, of the burden of His message, and of His emphasis upon Old Testament and eternal truths will vastly alter the proportions of dogma.

For the odd and curious thing is that when pastor or evangelist talks most earnestly, and dogmatician most vociferously, about "the pure gospel," "the plain, evangelical truth," "sound doctrine," etc., he means, even as he often specifies, what Jesus knew nothing about, pagan, ethnic, or Occidental infusions. He inventories a mass of Greek dialectic, or dogma whose date of medieval birth is known. Not only is emphasis laid on what formed no part of the teaching of Jesus, but on what is never referred to by Him or about which the New Testament is silent.

As Rembrandt refused to believe that art had but a single

tradition and but one stereotyped form, so does the man who knows his Bible well refuse to accept the churchman's limitations. As the painter went out into nature to question the great Original, so the man of Rembrandt mind, who would know the real Jesus and "be found in Him" goes directly to his Lord. To learn a saving measure of truth, he inquires of the Father. He is less anxious to be a member of the Salvation Trust, or the corporation that builds tariff walls around its monopoly, or to be of the elect, than to be a helper of the human race. He refuses to believe that the only tradition which our Occidental orthodoxy, our theological schools, our vociferous prelates, or our unethical revivalists know—the European tradition—is the only one. He knows for himself, and he is sure for his thinking neighbor at home and his trans-Pacific brother in Asia, that there is a yet purer form of Christianity—in Jesus Himself. To compel the nascent Christianity of Japan, for example, to stagger under the load of the Græco-Latin-Teutonic mass of accretions upon the simple gospel of Jesus, is to take the place of the Jerusalem schoolmen, scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus denounced.

Sure success awaits all who patiently adopt the Jesus Spirit and the Jesus Way. In direct antipodes to our methods, Jesus never appealed to the discursive intellect, but to the heart, and to man's divinely given intuitions. He was the Way, the Truth, the Life, not by argument but by manifestation. To His wise followers, the secret of Jesus' peace and joy is open. His victory will be theirs. The works that He did will we do and greater than these. Daily are His promises fulfilled. The average apostle never achieved the mighty works that Christian missionaries, and other men who take Jesus seriously, are doing to-day. To attribute the success of advancing Christianity to its *impedimenta*, instead of to its Author, its weapons, and the hearts behind them, is to commit the mistake of those who invoked the mythology of Beelzebub to explain the reality of the spiritual power of Jesus.

Those who compare the ecclesiastical and sectarian apparatus for binding truth, and its own sentence of doom written as a frontlet on the forehead of the Undying Book, "The Word of God is not bound," foresee an endless struggle, as of light and darkness, yet with a lessening prospect of heresy trials, and the dawning of a long, bright day. WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS.